

Legislative Report to the 46th District

Representative Phyllis Gutiérrez Kenney

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46th Legislative District

Olympia Office:

PO Box 40600
330 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7818

E-mail:

kenney.phyllis@leg.wa.gov

Web Page:

<http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/members/kenney/>

Committees:

Community Economic
Development and Trade - *Chair*

Appropriations

Appropriations Subcommittee
on Education

Joint Legislative Economic
Development & Trade Committee

Dear Neighbors:

First of all, please receive warm season's greetings for you and your families, and may the New Year bring joy, health and prosperity your way.

I want to take this opportunity to fill you in on what we accomplished last session, tell you why we held a special one-day session in late November, and give you a little information on some of the things I'll be working on in the 2008 session.

Last session we did great things to improve our education system, from early childhood to higher education. I was successful in my sponsorship of the bill creating Opportunity Grants which will provide funding for college tuition, fees and supplies for low-income students pursuing training in high demand fields.

We also extended health coverage to 38,000 more children in low-income families and approved the creation of a true children's mental health system.

And in the environmental front, we met our commitment to clean air and water with a directive that public agencies use 100% biofuels by 2015, and provided more than \$250 million in funding to help improve the quality and quantity of water in our state.

As chair of the House Community and Economic Development and Trade Committee, I helped shepherd through a measure creating Innovation Partnership Zones to strengthen the connections between research and business, and other bills providing technical assistance to small businesses.

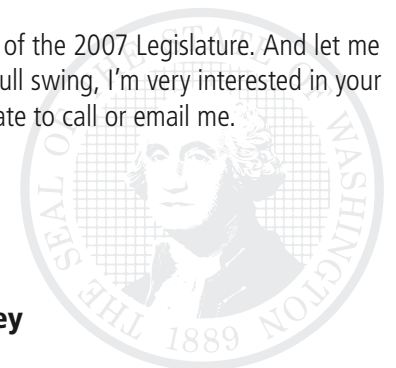
As a member of the House Appropriations Committee I helped shape the biennium budget that includes \$5.4 million in capital projects and \$30.3 million in transportation projects for the 46th District in 2007-09.

Read on for more details on the important work of the 2007 Legislature. And let me hear from you, now that the 2008 session is in full swing, I'm very interested in your input on how to serve you better, so don't hesitate to call or email me.

Sincerely,



Representative Phyllis Gutiérrez Kenney
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And last session we managed to extend health care coverage to 38,000 more children in families with income up to 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (that's \$51,625 for a family of 4).

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2007 Health care: great accomplishments

Children need health care if they're going to succeed in school and develop to their fullest potential. And last session we managed to extend health care coverage to 38,000 more children in families with income up to 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (that's \$51,625 for a family of 4). Effective Jan. 1, 2009, it will be extended even further to children in families at 300% of the FPL.

But there's also good news for the 520,000 adults in our state who can't afford health insurance, and the hundreds of small employers increasingly strapped to provide it, some relief came in the form of:

- The three-way Washington Health Insurance Partnership that will allow employers to decide how much they want to contribute to the cost of their employees' coverage, allow employees a choice of plans and let them use pre-tax dollars to pay their share of the premium, and provide state help to low-income employees struggling to pay their share of the premium.
- Extended health care coverage for former foster children over the age of 18.
- Approval of recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Health Care to strengthen our public health system and cut red tape by encouraging more electronic record-keeping in medical care.

Colorectal cancer screening

A personal triumph in health care legislation came with the governor's signature on House Bill 1337, which I sponsored to help reduce the number of people who are killed by colorectal cancer every year in our state.

Beginning in July 2008, health insurance plans will cover colorectal cancer screening exams and laboratory tests consistent with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These benefits will be provided to individuals at least 50 years old and to those under 50 if they are at high risk for colorectal cancer.

Early detection and treatment will help us strike back at this disease which claims 1,000 lives a year in Washington State.

2007 Education: wise investments

We passed legislation to ensure that the classrooms of today are not overly crowded, staffed with outstanding teachers and preparing our students to learn skills that will get them family-wage jobs.

- Funding to phase in all-day kindergarten in high-poverty schools.
- Providing another \$60 million in additional resources to school districts with high numbers of special education students.
- Allocating an additional \$350 million for teacher salaries, rewarding outstanding teachers with bonuses and recruiting multilingual students to become teachers.

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- Giving voters their say on whether their local school levies should be decided by a simple majority instead of the current 60%. And voters did the right thing by overwhelmingly approving it last fall!
- Funding 9,700 more slots in our universities and colleges.
- Providing scholarships to high-achieving low- and middle-income students pursuing a degree in math, science or related field.
- Qualifying more students for State Need Grants by allowing those enrolled for less than half time to apply.
- Providing tuition waivers for families of fallen veterans and National Guard members.

Expanding Opportunity Grants

I was very pleased with the passage of my bill expanding the Opportunity Grants program. These grants will help low-income students gain job skills that are in high demand. In the 2007 session, the Legislature appropriated a total of \$11.5 million per year to expand the Opportunity Grant program to all 34 community and technical colleges. In 2007-08 the Opportunity Grant program expects to serve 2,000 FTEs or approximately 4,000 students

The goal of Opportunity Grants is to help low-income adults reach the educational tipping point — and beyond — in high-wage, high-demand careers. Reaching the tipping point allows the least prepared individuals to increase job skills and knowledge through career pathways.



Rep. Gutiérrez Kenney, Governor Gregoire and Speaker Chopp at the Opportunity Grants Bill Signing Ceremony

Employers will benefit too as they are connected with workers with mid-level skills who can step into some of the 30,000 jobs annually that are now taking months to fill.

Due to its success so far, in the 2008 session I will work to continue expanding the Opportunity Grants program.

2007 Economy: more employers, more jobs

Last session we worked on ways to add to the 62,000 new jobs created in 2006 in Washington and continue supporting employers; these are some of the results:

- Transportation and Capital budgets for 2007-09 will support a total of 43,000 jobs through 2010.

- 21 million in the Capital Budget are funding several projects to assist economically-distressed communities in rural and urban Washington. These investments expand economic development and job opportunities, and help revitalize business and residential districts.
- More options for worker retraining with a vocational rehabilitation pilot program.
- Partnerships with industry to connect students through skill centers and technical training to career programs.
- More tourism marketing and creation of a competitive local grant program to help pay for local tourism promotions.
- Reduction of unemployment insurance rates for start-up businesses.
- Increasing the amount for the linked deposit loan program from \$100 million to \$150 million to give women- and minority-owned businesses more access to capital.

Special Session to restore cap on property-tax hikes

We passed two measures in the special session in late November — one that restores the cap on property-tax hikes exactly as it stood before the state Supreme Court struck down Initiative 747, and the other bill expands the deferral program to assist additional middle-income citizens and families.

However, we still need to work on reforming the property tax system because many families living on a fixed income are vulnerable to soaring



46th District Capital Budget projects

Statewide, the 2007-09 Capital Budget includes a record level \$880 million for K-12 construction and \$1.06 billion for higher education. In the 46th District, \$5.4 million from the Capital budget is funding these projects:

- \$7,500 in renovations for the 826 Seattle project under the Building for the Arts program.
- \$350,000 for North Helpline Lake City Court.
- \$1.5 million for the Nordic Heritage Museum
- Four different allocations for North Seattle Community College: Employment Resource Center (\$1.9 million); Facility preservation (\$358,875); Minor Works Program (\$767,600); Minor Works Preservation (\$486,500).

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property values and taxes. Senior citizens and disabled citizens most often have to live on a fixed income. It's only right that we do everything we can to prevent them from being taxed out of their homes.

Looking ahead: Protecting Homeowners in 2008

During the recent boom years for the mortgage lending industry, certain rules and regulations were relaxed and many lenders got creative in issuing new loans to consumers. Many of these consumers, who were shut out of the traditional

market lending before, were now being offered 'subprime' loans to get into homes. Some of these loan products included Adjustable Rate Mortgages (ARMs), 100% financing loans, interest-only loans and loans with low introductory rates. Most of these practices and loans were unheard of only 20 years ago, but because of rising home values across the nation, these loan practices continued until the recent bust.

While it may be true that our state has not been hit nearly as hard on the subprime crisis as other states, we have seen a slight spike in foreclosures in recent quarters. Some of the current ARMs will continue to reset in the next 6-12 months, but these practices are cyclical and it is critical we safeguard our consumers for any potential future lending schemes. Congress and the federal banking regulators are close to setting forth proposals that will help our nation's homeowners, but until such protections are in place, I will continue to advocate for additional consumer protections for my state's homeowners.



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